

IN THE CLAIMS

The pending claims are as follows. No amendments have been made.

1. (Previously Presented) A computer-implemented method for managing patent and trademark fees comprising:

inputting identification information for a patent or trademark matter of a client of a law firm and a requested fee associated with the matter for payment to an agency as data representing the identification information into a computer system;

deducting a charge for the requested fee against a client account maintained at least in part by an organization separate from the law firm for the client, the client account initially funded by the client such that the client account has a positive balance;

the organization generating a fee invoice to the law firm for the requested fee and transmitting the fee invoice to an accounting computer system used by the law firm;

generating a client invoice from the accounting computer system including a charge to the client for payment of the requested fee, wherein the payment of the requested fee is used to replenish the client account maintained by the organization, wherein the client invoice corresponds to the fee invoice to the law firm such that payment by the client to the law firm for the client invoice provides funds to replenish the client account; and

replenishing the client account with the funds collected from payment of the client invoice for the requested fee.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving notice of an event for the matter of the client of the firm that will require a second fee associated with the matter for payment to the agency by a due date; and

generating a second client invoice including a charge for the requested fee to pre-fund the client account maintained by the organization such that upon payment by the client prior to the due date the client account has a sufficient positive balance to cover the second fee.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the charge included on the second client invoice for the requested fee is less than the requested fee, the client account having a positive balance less than the requested fee.

4. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein generating the second client invoice comprises generating the second client invoice at an accounting computer system of the firm.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein generating the second client invoice comprises:

generating the charge for the requested fee at a fee computer system of the organization;
transmitting data regarding the charge from the fee computer system to an accounting computer system of the firm; and
generating the second client invoice at the accounting computer system.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein receiving notice of the event comprises:

receiving notice of the event at an accounting computer system of the firm; and
transmitting data regarding the event from the accounting computer system to a fee computer system of the organization.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising tracking a payment made by the client as covering one of an already made charge for a requested fee associated with a matter for payment to the agency and a charge to be made for a requested fee associated with a matter for payment to the agency.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, further comprising issuing a refund to the client for regular payment made thereby for charges to be made requested fees associated with a matter for payment to the agency.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein payment made by the client comprises a charging of one of a credit card and a charge card of the client.
10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the charging is automatic.
11. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the one of the credit card and the charge card comprises one of a Visa card, a MasterCard card, an American Express card, an Optima card, and a Discover card.
12. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the one of the credit card and the charge card of the client is sponsored by the organization.
13. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the one of the credit card and the charge card of the client is issued by the organization.
14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
computing interest on a positive balance of the client account to be paid to the client;
determining whether on average the client account has a positive balance; and
upon determining that on average the client account has a positive balance, providing for no cost issuance of the charge for the requested fee for transmittal to the agency.
15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
transmitting electronically data representing first information regarding the charge for the requested fee from the computer system to a fee computer system maintained by the organization;
inputting second information regarding the charge received from an external source as data representing the second information into the fee computer system; and
reconciling electronically the data representing the first information regarding the charge with the data representing the second information regarding the charge at the fee computer system.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, further comprising:

generating data representing a fee invoice including the charge at the computer system and electronically transmitting the data representing the fee invoice to an accounting computer system maintained by the firm;

generating a firm invoice including the charge at the fee computer system for delivery to the firm; and

wherein the client invoice corresponds to the firm invoice such that payment by the client to the firm for the client invoice is used as payment by the firm to the organization for the firm invoice.